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STAFF NOTES:

Soviet Union Eastern Europe

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State Dept. review completed

172
September 23, 1975

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SOVIET UNION - EASTERN EUROPE

25X1

C O N T E N T S

September 23, 1975

Fourth Cominformist Plot Reportedly Unearthed in Yugoslavia.	1
Yugoslav Party May Cut Its Ballast	2
Zhivkov Accentuates the Positive in Talks with Deputy Secretary Ingersoll	4

25X1

25X1

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25X1

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Fourth Cominformist Plot Reportedly
Unearthed in Yugoslavia

A leading West German newspaper has reported rumors from Belgrade that a new group of pro-Soviet dissidents has been arrested in Serbia and the province of Vojvodina.

According to the newspaper story, the new group is large, and numerous arrests have been made. Yugoslav authorities allegedly view the group's activities as serious because of unspecified "Soviet influences." A secret radio transmitter reportedly was uncovered during related investigations in the Serbian industrial town of Kragujevac.

If the newspaper report is accurate, the arrests could become a cause celebre. The report says "a certain Stenovic," who was in the postwar years a director of Tanjug, was implicated as a leader of the Serb Cominformists. We have no record of a Stenovic in this position, but Tihomir Stanovic held the Tanjug post after the war and from 1945-1965 served as Tito's personal press attache.

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September 23, 1975

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Yugoslav Party May Cut its Ballast

There are growing signs that the leadership in Belgrade is discussing the use of administrative measures to remove party members who avoid their duties or who only halfheartedly back the federal party's programs.

The Yugoslav party has more than a million members--seven percent of the eligible adult population. In the past, Tito has complained about its unwieldy size and slipshod ideological standards, and has on occasion threatened to thin the ranks by as many as 200,000 members.

Perhaps in response to Tito's renewed attention to potential enemies within the Yugoslav system, Belgrade has reportedly ordered an exchange of party cards as a means of paring away dead wood.

The card exchange may already be under way in Serbia. Over the past week, regional and federal officials there have been telling the local party membership to get with the party program or get out. On their list of sins are:

Idleness and passivism in party affairs,

Free interpretation of central committee directives and resultant ideological confusion, and

Careerism (using party membership to acquire better jobs) and demagoguery under the guise of party loyalty.

It has been over two years since the Yugoslav party's last major purge, and some officials may believe that this fact alone is reason enough for

September 23, 1975

a housecleaning. Given Tito's reported determination to eliminate all sources of opposition and to shore up party discipline, he may this time press the issue and reduce the membership in significant numbers.

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September 23, 1975

Zhivkov Accentuates the Positive
in Talks with Deputy Secretary Ingersoll

In a conversation with Deputy Secretary Ingersoll in Sofia last week, party and state leader Todor Zhivkov said he would like to see an across-the-board improvement in relations. Zhivkov has long been concerned over the low priority that he believes the US attaches to Bulgaria and was eager to assure US officials of his desire to move forward on several bilateral issues. The most promising at this time is a cultural-scientific exchange agreement. Zhivkov seemed particularly interested in acquiring US technology.

Zhivkov went out of his way to disclaim the notion that Bulgaria was a puppet of the Soviet Union. He stressed the "enormous differences" between the two countries, focusing on Sofia's decision to abolish and replace collective farms with "agro-industrial complexes." On a more realistic note, however, he referred to a recent speech before the ambassadorial corps in which he noted that if he started criticizing the USSR, "I would be ousted, and I am no fool."

Discussion of expanded trade, including the granting of most-favored-nation status to Bulgaria, pursued a familiar path, with the Secretary prodding Zhivkov to remove irritants on the Bulgarian side that have impeded progress.

Zhivkov appeared eager to minimize trouble spots, including Sofia's press treatment of the US. Zhivkov asserted that "we can agree even now" that if articles appeared which hindered improved relations, "we will eliminate them or reduce them to a minimum, or modify them."

September 23, 1975

On the humanitarian issue of "divided families," Zhivkov grandiosely announced that less than 100 individuals, "less than a planeload," are involved, and "you could send an airplane for them right now." The Bulgarian leader has in the past made similar magnanimous comments on this issue, but has failed to follow up his words with deeds.

Throughout the conversation with the highest-ranking US official to visit Bulgaria to date, Zhivkov was his usual ebullient and self-confident self.

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September 23, 1975

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Next 7 Page(s) In Document Exempt

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